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AUTHOR DaGiau, Bette J.
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ABSTRACT

The Adolescent Development course, implemented to facilitate the growth of adolescents, is presented in three parts: the first addresses the student's self-concept and provides skills for effective management of relationships; the second focuses on student learning style and improving academic achievement skills; the final part consists of a career inventory which is elaborated through research activities in the student's area of interest. Conducted at a middle school in northeastern New Jersey, the study included 76 seventh grade students (38 participants, 38 in a control group). The study consisted of a survey of demographic information, a pre and post class survey, and observations. Research questions were: (1) Are seventh grade students more aware of their self-concept after completing the Adolescent Development class? (2) Do they understand their relationships and the effect that self-image has on them? (3) Does participating in a class designed to improve self-concept and awareness have an effect on their desire to explore possible future careers? and (4) Do the students have a better understanding of their individual learning styles that will impact on their academic progress? It was concluded that students who participated in the course increased their self-concept and self-awareness. (JBJ)

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ED 386 609

CHARACTERISTICS OF SEVENTH GRADE STUDENTS WHO COMPLETED A COURSE IN ADOLESCENT DEVELOPMENT COMPARED TO STUDENTS THAT HAVE NOT COMPLETED THE COURSE

A thesis submitted to
The School of Education at
William Paterson College of New Jersey
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
Master of Education
in Counseling

by
Bette J. DaGiau
May 1995

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ABSTRACT

Adolescence is a time of transition and discovery that requires a course of guidance that will provide them with the necessary skills to achieve success as adults. The Adolescent Development course was implemented to facilitate the growth of adolescents who face these challenges. The course is presented in three parts; first to address the self-concept of the student and provide skills for effective management of relationships. The second phase of the course focuses on the learning style of the student and improving skills necessary for academic achievement. The last part of the course consists of a career inventory which is then elaborated on through research activities in their area of interest. The study was conducted at a middle school in northeastern New Jersey with seventy-six seventh graders, thirty-eight who had not participated in the course and thirty-eight that had completed the program. This research study will consist of three components: a survey of demographic information, pre and post class surveys and observations. An attempt will be made to answer the following questions: (1) Are seventh grade students more aware of their self-concept after completing the Adolescent Development class? (2) Do they understand their relationships and the effect that self-image has on them? (3) Does participating in a class designed to improve self-concept and awareness have an effect on their desire to explore possible future careers? (4) Do the students have a better understanding of their individual learning styles that will impact on their academic progress? Based on the data collected for this study it can concluded that students who have participated in this course do have an increase in their self-concept and self-awareness. Interest and participation in the career phase of the course was enthusiastic and data shows a significant change in the positive responses of the students. Based on this study, curriculum-based guidance courses have a positive impact on adolescent development and should be part of the middle school program

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Adolescence is a time of exploration and discovery. Knowing that teenagers experience great changes in their early stage of adolescence, seventh graders were selected to participate in an effective life skills program that was introduced into the curriculum this year. The broad scope of physical, social, emotional and intellectual development which is characteristic of this age has shown us that students would benefit from the introduction to and education in specific coping strategies necessary for growth. Implementation of this program was intended to make the transition for seventh graders from their teens to adulthood, a successful one.

Although this course is offered to the seventh grade district population as a separate course, it can be considered a synthesis of the various subject areas. It incorporates and addresses areas of family life and health, social studies, study skills and learning styles and counseling and guidance issues.

All students in the seventh grade participate in the course for one full marking period lasting ten weeks. The class meets five days a week for forty-two minutes. The course was designed to provide students with the opportunity to study, select and work in a non-biased environment and participate in activities geared to meet the needs of the students, regardless of race, religion, ethnic background, sex, socio-economic status or specific educational classification. Each student is afforded materials and teaching techniques that provide for equal opportunities and optional alternatives.

The life skills course was developed with several objectives in mind. It was divided into three areas within the marking period restrictions to meet the variety of objectives that were intended.

The first part of the course focuses on the interpersonal relationships of the students including family, teachers and friends. Students explore and identify emotions they experience and how to appropriately respond and express these emotions. They explore and identify their own personal qualities and traits and identify those

that they consider to be positive and those that are negative. Role-playing activities are designed to assist students in accepting their own emotions as well as the emotions of others they may come in contact with. Part of this area also addresses defining friendship and selecting friends, how to differentiate between positive and negative peer influences and how to listen and communicate with friends. Within this exploration, identifying sources of conflicts, the emotions and reactions conflict may invoke and skills in knowing how to resolve conflict using decision-making models are addressed.

The importance of identifying the students' role in the family relationship is also incorporated in this first phase of the course. Discussions and activities to emphasize the importance of some kind of family unit and how to meet one's needs within that family unit are presented. Adult/child conflicts, family problems, coping skills and opting for resolutions within the family are also part of this phase. The various other life roles, the transition from one to the other and the impact each role has on their lives are also explored.

The second major area of development in this course is the exploration of learning styles, study and organizational skills and

the possible options for learning techniques that may enhance the achievement of the students. Having students identify their own unique learning style and helping them find alternative methods of applying these styles to their academics is a major objective of this part of the course. Learning to concentrate and focus on a task and manage their time to maximize efficiency and effectiveness should help the student develop a sense of confidence and accept challenges. Exercises to improve listening skills and identifying the details in both written and oral drills provide reinforcement for the students.

The third section of the Adolescent Development course is for the exploration of future careers. Students are given a career assessment to help them identify characteristics that are related to particular career interests. Students complete a research project to find information about their chosen career. Their research includes the educational requirements of the job, the skills required, the duties of the position, the salary ranges and the prospects of openings in the future. The culmination of this area of study is a "dress for success" day to demonstrate awareness about their

chosen career and a time to participate in mock interviews to show their competency.

The role of the teacher of the course is one of personal responsibility to the program. The teacher must be willing to share his or her own feelings and experiences when it is appropriate. The teacher is expected to participate in many of the activities with the class. Through these first objectives, the teacher should develop a caring and secure environment for the students. The teacher should be a student advocate and model good listening and respect for individual uniqueness. These qualities will create a cohesive working group and allow students in the program to participate freely, with trust.

This study explores the Adolescent Development course completed by seventh graders in the third marking period of the school year. Conclusions will be made and comparisons concerning the effectiveness of this course will be drawn from surveys taken from the students who have completed the class and those who will begin the course in the fourth marking period.

Statement of the Problem

Are seventh grade students more aware of their self-concept after completing the Adolescent Development class? Do they understand their relationships and the effect that self-image has on them? Does participating in a class designed to improve self-concept and awareness have an effect on their desire to explore possible future careers? Do the students have a better understanding of their individual learning styles that will impact on their academic progress? This study of the Adolescent Development course and its effect on students will attempt to answer these questions.

This study will explore the various techniques and methods used in the classes as well as the characteristics of the seventh grade students who participated in it. A comparison of 38 students who completed the ten week course will be compared to 38 students who have not taken the class yet this year. The selection of these students will be described in Chapter 3 in the subject area.

Hypotheses

1. Students who have completed the Adolescent Development course

feel they have a better understanding of their self-concept than those who have not taken the course.

2. Students who have completed this course have a better understanding of their relationships with family and peers.

3. Students who have completed this class have more self-awareness about their learning style and possess strategies for effective studying than those who have not completed the class.

4. Students who have not taken this class have less awareness of career preferences and how to explore career opportunities than those who have completed the course.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to examine the awareness seventh graders have of their own self-concept, their individual learning styles and the effect these have on the exploration of future careers.

Significance of the Problem

There are many concerns in the field of education about how a child's self-concept affects his or her achievement, relationships and ability and understanding of how to set goals for the future. The New Jersey Model is a developmental theory based on the premise

that children go through developmental stages as they mature (The New Jersey Developmental Guidance and Counseling Initiative, 1994). This theory states that at each of these stages, students must be provided with learning experiences to steadily move forward to successful adulthood. In support of this theory, the Adolescent Development course was developed to provide an effective program to facilitate positive student experiences for their emotional and intellectual growth.

Limitations of the Study

The study was limited to one middle school in northeastern New Jersey. Surveys were distributed and completed during two class periods, to two groups of 38 seventh graders. The surveys were taken from two classes taught by the same teacher. A separate survey to identify some personal characteristics of the students being studied was distributed as well. This was also completed within one class period for each group.

Delimitations of the Study

The study was limited to one middle school in a city that has two middle schools. There are some significant differences between

these two schools in the ethnic and socio-economic composition due to the district divisions. There may also be some significant differences in the teaching styles and methods used by other teachers. The results of this study should not be applied to both middle schools in the city.

Definitions of Terms

Several of the definitions used in this study were taken from a few different sources. Therefore, I have cited each following the definition.

Self-concept: The way in which an individual sees himself or herself.

Self-esteem: What an individual takes in from others about himself or herself.

Locus of control: The belief that individual events and circumstances in life are either internally or externally controlled (Belkin, 1988, p. 561).

Adolescent Development: A course of study designed for the improvement of self-concept in

seventh grade students which includes the exploration of life skills, learning skills and career awareness (Clifton Board of Education, 1994)

Life skills: Skills used in understanding human relationships, resolving conflicts and identifying and expressing personal values.

Chapter 2

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Self-esteem, or self-concept as it is also called, has been defined in many ways. Brinthaupt and Lipka (1985) define self-esteem as a "valuative judgement a person makes about such attributes or roles, based on the relevant values or values indicators held by that person" (p. 207). What this and all of the various other definitions have in common is the theory that there is a process involved in self-concept. That process may be a description of one's self or it can be the result of one's perceptions or reflections or it may possibly be the individual's response to a perception or reflection. In any case, one's self-concept generally refers to the outcome of an individual's perception of himself in combination with how he/she is perceived by others. One's self-concept, therefore, is responsible not only for causing a person's particular behaviors but also has an effect on an individual's experiences.

Middle school children who are in transition between pre-adolescence and adolescence have difficulty identifying and expressing their self-concept. In the earlier period, children often

describe themselves in terms of their appearance and the external facets of their beings. They relate to their tangible possessions, those that are able to be seen, along with their observable behavior. When children become adolescents these characteristics tend to turn more internal and now include their thoughts and feelings. Older adolescents describe themselves more in terms of their age, the various roles they assume in their life and their relationship to a group. They tend to also include concerns and interests in achieving particular goals. Conversely, the younger children and up to the pre-adolescent ages are more apt to express their feelings about their family relationships, their particular possessions and their physical appearance.

In their study of the differences in self-concept and self-esteem, Brinthaupt and Lipka (1985) found that as the many roles persons have and their memberships in a variety of role categories increase with age, a greater concern with occupation emerges and students feel more pressure from the real world. All of these conditions interacting and combining with the school setting would suggest that indeed, the school setting impacts greatly on one's

identity.

Considering the psychosocial stages of development identified by Erikson, the fifth stage is the beginning of adolescence. At this stage individuals will develop either a sense of identity or a sense of identity confusion. This stage establishes who the individual is and results in the development of an overall personality. When the previous stages of development have been established in positive ways, the adolescent will have a positive self-concept.(Hamachek, 1988)

Students identify themselves with their peer groups and find satisfaction in being members of these groups. Group acceptance at the middle school level is extremely important. It was once the teacher that the student relied on for approval and support but as adolescence sets in students risk disapproval from teachers and parents in order to attempt to achieve a feeling of independence.

In addition to the change in sources of approval, the values of the student tend to be influenced more from their friends than from their family. Seeking and taking pride in academic success becomes less important to many students and the key to approval comes in

the form of social acceptance from peers.

Kramer (1988) points out that "the lack of self-esteem, the inability to communicate thoughts and feelings on a genuine level, few conflict resolution or decision-making skills and unrealistic expectations about how life is supposed to be, are four of the most important factors in the problems of adolescents" (p. 56).

In The Dynamics of Relationships, Kramer, (1985) proposes an environment for young people to openly express themselves concerning issues that are personal and sensitive to them. This program is a one year program which meets once a day. The first objective of this program is to build a sense of self-worth. Students also learn effective communication skills to improve peer interactions, achieve conflict resolution and an ability to express emotions. Students explore and develop expectations about their life roles, present and future, in relationships.

Teachers of this program are chosen more often because of certain personal qualities regardless of what particular subject they may ordinarily teach. These teachers need to be able to help students build a positive self-concept, develop a sense of personal

pride and facilitate in having students learn decision-making skills without doing it for them.

Further research supports the theory that enhancing self-esteem in students is of value. Peter Gurney (1987) examines studies which explored the evidence of improving students' self-concept in conjunction with better achievement in school, more positive behavior traits and with greater social acceptance. The implications from this research suggests several issues should be examined. First, it is valuable for teachers to give attention to all students, especially those who demonstrate low self-esteem. Secondly, teachers who have a knowledge of their students' backgrounds are more able to assist in the development of self-esteem. Thirdly, teacher encouragement and reinforcement of positive behaviors enables students to act from an internal locus of control rather than an external one. Fourth, teacher communication with parents is helpful in developing, reinforcing and maintaining self-esteem of students. Finally, the school must provide a positive support system and plan for intervention in the daily setting. This plan should involve all school personnel to facilitate staff

cohesiveness and a staff support system as well.

Harper and Marshall (1991) define adolescence as "the developmental period of transition between being a dependent child to a self-sufficient adult" (p. 799).

The difficulty early adolescents face is they have a strong need to be recognized as individuals and resent being treated like children. They are not ready to assume the responsibilities of being an adult but are caught in a period of struggling for both their independence and their personal identity.

Girls in the adolescent stages seem to have more difficulty with their interpersonal relationships than the boys do. This is the time when fighting and arguing among friends, especially those of the same sex is a common occurrence. The girls also experience anxiety about how they are perceived by the boys in terms of whether they are liked or are attractive to the opposite sex.

Boys, however, become concerned about finances, personal possessions and vocational issues. They do share some of the same anxieties about being accepted by the girls but it seems to be to a lesser degree.

A number of studies, several of which are noted in Harper and Marshall (1991) suggest that girls seem to experience a substantially lower self-esteem than boys do, especially around the age of puberty. This would support the theory that the individual's total self-esteem is affected greatly by his or her body image which is a prime concern of adolescents during puberty.

In studying the self-concept of adolescents using the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale, Hagborg (1993) found a strong relationship between the adolescents' body image as it relates to global self-esteem.

How you feel about yourself affects how you relate to others. If developed feelings of being unable to make friends to be liked by peers are perceived as real, individuals will not attempt to look for friendship. This becomes a syndrome of self-fulfilling prophecy. This kind of self-image can be harmful to an individual because the individual may truly desire friendship, but feelings of being unworthy of it can cause inner conflict.

In contrast, if an individual sees himself as a valuable person and is aware of his/her personal strengths, the individual will be

able to form and maintain relationships. Individuals with a positive self-image are able to accept themselves and others as they are without comparing themselves to others or have the need to receive external reassurance.

Self-concept determines our personal style and shapes our definitions of what a person is and ought to be (Kalellis, 1982). Adolescents are in a period of constant change which is both physical and emotional. In all change there is a fear of the unknown and the taking of risks. Personal growth signals a loss of familiarity with what has been up until now. These signals can trigger anxiety about changing old familiar patterns. Adolescents receive a variety of conflicting messages from adults because they are caught in this period of transition between childhood and adulthood.

In the past the educational system has been remiss in supporting the transitional stage of adolescence. The system supported regulations in what students should study at what particular time with little regard for their need for building self-esteem or finding their identity. This past practice has caused students to experience the discouragement of their natural curiosity

due to the regulations placed upon them.

More recent developments in the areas of both education and parenting point toward the recognition of the developing self-concept of the adolescent. This evolution is one of allowing adolescents to discover how they fit into the world of learning, forming relationships, exploring the possibilities for a future career and developing an individual value system.

It has been shown that children who have had emotionally close and trusting relationships with the adults they interact with have a better self-image and are more influenced by these adults (Glen and Nelson, 1989). Children who have not had this kind of positive interaction tend to turn to peers for acceptance and are more susceptible to peer influences.

In a program instituted in Sarasota Florida called PRIMETIME, middle school students were given a thirty minute period each day to meet with a teacher advisor (Highland, 1990). The purpose of this program was to have the teacher advisors build a relationship of trust and respect with their students. Their objective was to provide the students with a sense of safety and security within the

school environment and have them feel accepted among both the adults and peers of the school. The teacher advisors served as models for the students and demonstrated coping skills that the students could implement into their lives.

Programs such as PRIMETIME are implemented to provide students, particularly at the middle school level, with opportunities to develop positive feelings of self-worth, effective interpersonal skills with peers and adults and encourage positive thinking to help lead them to further goal-setting skills.

The results of the PRIMETIME program in the Florida study shows a significant need for concentration in areas of developing self-worth and a positive self-concept among seventh grade students (Myrick and Myrick, 1990).

The changing needs among all adolescent students have required the implementation of counseling classes to address the areas of improving self-concept. Several external factors contribute to this evolution. The transience of families due to corporate mobility and the changes in the economic status of families related to the changing economy, the arrival of new immigrants into this

country on an increasing basis and the high divorce rate have all contributed to instability in what used to be a secure family unit (New Jersey Developmental Guidance and Counseling Initiative, !994). These programs in the schools provide a well-planned guidance program which is no longer the sole responsibility of the school counselor, but now involves the entire staff of a school building. The guidance programs incorporated into the school curriculum are designed to increase self-awareness and self-image. They provide students with the self-understanding and life skills that are necessary to successfully move through the developmental stage of adolescence to adulthood.

In addition to focusing on improving the self-concept of the adolescent, classes in this program are providing them with specific study skills to become more effective learners through a curriculum which addresses all the needs of students and is beneficial to the entire school population (Kruger, 1990). Programs which are devised to meet the broad spectrum of needs of the adolescent have a positive effect on the global self-image of the individual.

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As an individual's self-concept develops it will have a great

effect on the goals one will set and how productive and successful one will become. As an individual looks at his/her self-image it can be divided into four major areas (Lustig, 1992). First, it is necessary to identify what your personal style is. This includes how to relate to the people around you and how to communicate to others. It also includes the ability to see one's self as a positive individual among one's peers. Secondly, to be cognizant of your own needs, what your personal values are and what motivates you to set and achieve goals. Thirdly, to know and accept your own strengths and weaknesses and the skills that you have to be productive. Finally and most importantly, one should have an awareness of one's own identity. To know what one's own developmental needs are and be aware of both positive and negative beliefs of behavior patterns give an individual an awareness of his/her own self. This allows the individual to reach his/her own potential. Being aware of these four major areas about one's self will bring about a life that is more satisfying and effective to the individual (Lustig, 1992).

The National Career Development Guidelines (1989) has cited that the knowledge of self-concept and its importance is

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The National Career Development Guidelines (1989) has cited that the knowledge of self-concept and its importance is

significant, particularly at the middle school level. These students should have an understanding of how important a positive self-concept is and the influence it can have on one's life. Students at this level should have the skills necessary to express their likes and dislikes. They should have the ability to examine their personal behaviors and understand how those behaviors impact on the feelings and actions of those they interact with.

Adolescents with a positive self-concept should be able to describe their own unique skills and identify the skills they need to satisfy the various life roles they assume. This ability will assist them in identifying their own strengths and weaknesses and how they relate to occupations they will pursue in the future. Providing adolescents with an environment that encourages exploration of personal beliefs and attitudes will help them identify their personal, educational and occupational interests. Students will understand the relationship between their various life roles and how each of these roles is connected to satisfying personal goals. They will also be more prepared and able to identify the various amounts of participation, motivation, talent and energy that are needed to

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complete different tasks.

The Lions-Quest Skills for Adolescence (1992) program is a program developed to facilitate the process of experiencing adolescence in a positive way. This program is incorporated into the middle school curriculum to teach and develop social competencies and social skills designed to strengthen the over-all self-concept of the adolescent. In this program students learn and practice how to be responsible for their own actions, how to manage their attitudes and emotions and how to build positive relationships with family and peers. Students are expected and encouraged to use critical thinking skills, interpretations and reasoning abilities to develop social skills that will provide positive growth. The Lions-Quest program was designed to address the needs of the middle school child. It supports the belief that if young people have a positive self-concept they will value themselves more and believe in their own self-worth. This positive self-image can have a strong influence on the choices they will make and the goals they will set. It is also felt that if adolescents have a positive self-concept and feel they can impact on the world around them, they will be able

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affect their environment in a positive way.

Bringing about change in the self-concept is possible, but it is a very slow, sometimes almost undetectable growth (Canfield and Wells, 1976). Providing adolescents with an open and accepting learning environment which facilitates self-exploration and fosters the building of a positive self-concept is necessary in today's changing society.

Chapter 3

DESIGN OF THE STUDY

Procedures

This study was conducted at a middle school in northeastern New Jersey. The school staff consists of two administrators, seventy-eight classroom teachers, two resource room teachers, one ESL-bilingual teacher, two basic skills instructors, a speech therapist, four music teachers, four physical education/health teachers, one nurse and a three-member child study team on site.

There are 862 students in this middle school. The school population consists of 76.5% Caucasian, 14.5% Hispanic, 3% Black, 4% Asian and 2% other students. The majority of the school population is from average income families. Presently, 12% of the school children are eligible for free or reduced lunches.

There is an active Home and School Association which has parents present at all school dances and other functions. They provide rewards for students who participate in various school activities usually in the form of pizza parties. The Association also conducts a book fair at the school twice a year.

The school is located in an area predominantly surrounded by one family homes arranged in development settings. Due to the district policies on dividing the school population, 28% of the student body is transported by school bus from other parts of the district. Many of these students live in two-family or multiple dwelling homes. Approximately 18% of the students in the middle school have attended more than one other school,excluding the elementary school attended before attending middle school. There is a moderate rate of transience in this area.

The Adolescent Development course for seventh graders was instituted into the curriculum this year. During the month of July, 1995 a committee composed of three teachers, one middle school counselor and the district counseling supervisor developed the course philosophy and objectives to provide for the developmental needs of the early adolescent. The committee also compiled classroom activities to meet the course objectives. Teachers who were part of the committee are teaching the course at this time.

In January, 1995, thirty-eight students who were beginning the Adolescent Development course were given survey forms to

complete. At this time, one half of the 272 seventh graders in the school had participated in the program and completed the course and one half had not.

The thirty-eight students who received the surveys to fill out at the beginning of the third marking period were selected for a number of reasons. The program had been in effect for two marking periods and the district felt a survey to determine the effectiveness of the course would be a valuable tool in the review and need for revisions to be done during the summer of 1995.

This research is being done to determine the particular areas of the course that are helpful to students and what impact, if any, this course has had on the self-concept of the participants. A comparison was made of the students who were beginning the course and a group of thirty-eight students who had completed the course previously.

Students who had not had the Adolescent Development course at the time of the survey, shown in Appendix A, required clarification of some of the questions on the survey and the meaning of some of the vocabulary used. A second survey, shown in Appendix

B, was made with slight variations in the wording of items, for students who had completed the course at an earlier time. In order to do the comparison part of my research the surveys were designed to be relevant for all the students in the study. An additional identical questionnaire to compile background information was given to both groups.

This research is being done to examine the relevancy and effectiveness of the Adolescent Development program to provide a curriculum-based guidance program for seventh grade students. The study will explore and discuss the improvement of the self-concept of the students who participate.

Subjects

Seventy-six, seventh grade students were the main subjects of this study. Thirty-eight students who completed the post-course survey have completed the Adolescent Development course. In this group, twenty-two were seventh grade girls and sixteen were seventh grade boys. An equal amount of each sex and grade were matched as closely as possible for the group of students who were given the pre-course survey.

Personal observation of all the student subjects was conducted on a daily basis and provided me with a first-hand knowledge of their personalities and characteristics.

Data Sources and Collection

The majority of the data sources for the development of surveys was taken from articles and books (Wiersma, 1995; Babbie, 1992; Bracken, 1992; Lions-Quest, 1992; RAP, 1989).

The demographic survey was developed by having access and input from the guidance personnel and the registration forms that the school system keeps on record.

The open-ended question on the post-course survey, Appendix B, was designed as a curiosity to give the students an opportunity to comment and make suggestions about the course.

Treatments and Instruments Used for Data Selection

Surveys were distributed to four class groups during one class period each in which I was present. This made it possible for me to clarify and define any questions regarding the survey. Several students who completed the pre-course survey did require

explanations of the meanings of statements used on the survey .

The general survey given to both groups provided additional information about each individual regarding school and home life.

Chapter 4

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This research consisted of four components: a guidance survey of background information, a pre-course survey, a post-course survey and observations. The guidance survey of background information was given to all seventh grade students who participated in this study. Observations were conducted on a daily basis during the Adolescent Development classes.

The pre-course survey consisted of twelve statements. The first four of these statements were designed to determine the perceptions the students have of themselves and their relationships with others. The next four statements dealt with information about their understanding of learning styles. The last four questions were indicators of their goal-setting and career interests. Results of these survey statements are recorded in Tables 1,2 and 3.

The post-course student survey consisted of eleven objective statements about the Adolescent Development course the students had just completed. The last question was a subjective question to survey their individual opinions of what they would change or add to

the course. The statements of this survey were designed to cover the three areas of the course. The first four statements related to the life-skills portion, the next four covered the learning and study skills phase and the last three surveyed the career inventory that was completed. The results shown in Table 4 are illustrators of the first four statements which attempt to determine the understanding the students have of themselves and how they see themselves in their relationships with peers, parents and teachers after the course is complete. It should be noted that the selections the students made in this area show a positive response toward themselves and their relationships. In the comparison of responses from students in the pre-course survey, their responses were more widely distributed and show a lesser degree of confidence in their positiveness. Statement 2 from both surveys was specific to the student's abilities to express themselves freely to the people around them. The students who had not participated in the Adolescent Development course showed a negative response to this statement, evenly divided between the categories of disagree and strongly disagree with a total of 64% combined. Students who had completed

the course had more responses in the positive categories, showing a combined positive response of 63%. Statement 3 was focused on the relationship students have with parents and how they are perceived by their parents. Adolescence is a time when parent/child relationships are most difficult and results of the two surveys were indicative of this. The students who had not received the course and completed the activities designed to explore these relationships showed a significantly higher percentage of negative feelings, 47% in the disagree category and 22% in the strongly disagree category. The group which had completed the life skills activities reported a positive response in their perceptions of how their parents feel about them. Results show an almost even division between the strongly agree response of 37% and the agree response of 39%. The statements relating to the study skills area and learning styles of the students showed less discrepancies in the degrees of answers. The statements that were concerned with working in groups and listening skills showed little change in the two groups. The most significant statement in this category dealt with the learning styles of students, which showed an increase of 48% in positive responses

following the course, as seen in Table 5. The last statements of the survey asked for responses related to career planning for the future. The most significant differences in the groups' responses appeared in this section. Both showed almost an equal curiosity and interest in their future careers which leads me to believe this is the area which is most important in the Adolescent Development course. In the group of students which had not had the course, 75% responded negatively to the statement concerning a knowledge of how to conduct career research for themselves. Following the career portion of the course, 93% of the responses to this same statement were positive. Table 6 shows an increase in the students' confidence about making choices that would affect their futures also showed a marked increase of 50% following their participation in this course. The open-ended question at the end of the post-course survey provided an opportunity for students to name specific things about the class that they would change. Many students stated that they would like this course to be part of their regular schedule and last a full school year rather than for a quarter of the school year.

The guidance survey requested demographic information from

the students about their sex, race and ethnic background, home life, their knowledge of their parents' skills, education and work, and the students' understandings about the careers they wish to pursue. The survey given was the same for both groups and was composed of 62% female and 38% male students in each group. The ethnic distribution of students was close in percentages to the overall percentages of the school population shown in Table 8, Appendix E.

Many of the students in this study live in two parent households. This applies to 63% of the students in the pre-course survey and 58% of those in the post-course group. In 88% of all of the two-parent families surveyed, both parents in the household are employed on a full or part-time basis. In all of the one-parent families of the students, the parent or guardian is employed. In almost all of the questions concerning the nature of the parents' employment the students knew the job their parents did and the hours of employment, however they lacked an understanding of the skills and education that their parents had as well as the duties that they performed at these jobs.

Question 8, 9 and 10 of this survey asked students about their

perfect career, the level of training it would require and the restrictions that would prevent achieving this career. In both groups, over 81% of the students chose careers or gave answers based on the desire to make a great deal of money. In this response, only 56% of these students had an idea of the level of training they would need in order to achieve this status. Question 10 asked what factor would prevent them from achieving their perfect career. In this question, 32% chose too many years of study as their main reason, 34% felt the job was too hard, 10% cited not being smart enough, 12% chose poor grades in school, 6% felt there was too much competition for the job and 6% felt they could never do it, it was just a dream. The feelings of hopelessness in their reasons for not achieving their perfect career is one of the concerns of the course. There seems to be a direct correlation between low self-concept and low expectations for the future. This is further supported in the responses to Questions 14 through 18. In most of the responses by the students, these answers were consistent with the responses in Question 10, which can be seen in Table 7. The remainder of the information on this survey is also listed in Table 7a, Appendix D.

Observations of the students were also an important aspect of this study. I was able to interact with the students and participate in the activities of the Adolescent Development classes. I observed their enthusiasm and willingness to explore their own abilities and behaviors. They were also very anxious to participate in the career inventory and research activities related to their results. I was the instructor of the class for the time the students participated and this gave me first-hand knowledge of what they were feeling and how they reacted to the various phases of the course. I was able to see them interact socially in the informal activities of the program as well as guide them in the exploration of their personalities and goals for the future.

Table 1

Percentage of student responses to the first four pre-course survey statements on self-concept and relationships.
SA (Strongly Agree) A (Agree) D (Disagree) SD (Strongly Disagree)

Part I	SA	A	D	SD
1. I know who I am and understand my feelings.	3	56	35	6
2. It is easy for me to express my likes and dislikes freely.	11	25	32	32
3. I understand my parents and how they feel about me.	6	25	47	22
4. I feel I can solve problems.	0	34	48	18

The results of the pre-course statements concerning the self-concept of the students and their relationships shows that the majority of students in this group feel they know themselves and understand their feelings. In spite of the 59% that feel this way, 64% of the same students feel they cannot express their likes and dislikes freely, 69% do not really understand their parents or know how their parents feel about them and more than half of the group, 66%, do not feel they know how to solve their own problems. One of the purposes of this course is to explore the students' understanding of themselves. Although many students feel they do know who they are, they do not reflect this in many of their other answers.

Table 2

Percentage of students responses to the second three statements of the pre-course survey related to learning skills.
SA (Strongly Agree) A (Agree) D (Disagree) SD (Strongly Disagree)

Part II	SA	A	D	SD
5. I feel comfortable working in small groups and talking to others.	35	54	11	0
6. I know how I learn best.	6	25	58	11
7. I think listening is an important skill.	32	47	15	6

Statement 5 is an objective one which may or may not be indicative of a student's learning style, but may rather relate to their level of sociability in the classroom. Most students seem to enjoy group work and the ability to talk. Through discussion with this group, most students' comments related group work to working less and being more relaxed, feeling less personal pressure to achieve. The majority of the group, 79%, did not feel they know how they learned best, and again, through discussion I found the students did not understand what this statement truly meant. I feel listening also showed a majority of positive responses because it is a skill that is reinforced in all educational settings.

Table 3

Percentage of student responses to the next four statements of the pre-course survey on career knowledge and curiosity.
SA (Strongly Agree) A (Agree) D (Disagree) SD (Strongly Disagree)

Part III	SA	A	D	SD
8. I am curious and interested about my future career.	30	52	12	6
9. I know how to look for information about careers I may be interested in.	0	25	58	17
10. I feel I know how to make choices that will affect my future.	0	34	48	18
11. I want to learn more about myself.	21	52	21	6

The percentages in Part III show the most significant responses by students concerning their future careers and choices they must make as they plan for them. Table III shows that 82% of the students are interested in what they will do in the future and 75% of these students do not know where to find information about these careers. Statement 10 shows that 66% of the students are not sure how to make choices now that will affect their future and 73% want to learn more about themselves in planning for a career.

Table 4

Percentage of students responses to the first four post-course survey statements on self-concept and relationships.
SA (Strongly Agree) A (Agree) D (Disagree) SD (Strongly Disagree)

Part I	SA	A	D	SD
1. I know more about myself and my feelings.	28	56	13	3
2. I am more able to express my likes and dislikes to friends and adults.	13	50	29	8
3. I understand more about my parents and how they feel about me.	37	39	21	3
4. I know more about how to solve problems.	13	63	21	3

The responses by the students in the post-course group show an increase in positive responses for Statements 2,3 and 4. In each case the students responded with higher percentages in these categories, but particularly in the Strongly Agree area. Although the same percentage of students feel they know who they are, in Statement 1, there is a 10% increase in the response of students who strongly agree. In my opinion there is personal growth that takes place by students participating in this course.

Table 5

Percentage of student responses to the second three statements of the post-course survey on learning.
SA (Strongly Agree) A (Agree) D (Disagree) SD (Strongly Disagree)

Part II	SA	A	D	SD
5. I feel more comfortable working in groups and talking to others.	34	45	18	3
6. I understand more about how I learn.	13	66	18	3
7. I feel that listening to others is an important skill.	41	56	0	3

Statement 5 shows a similarity in the percentage of students that are comfortable working in groups, however, it is slightly lower after completing the course. There is a 10% increase in the percentage of students from Table 2 who disagree that they are more comfortable. This may be attributed to the large amount of group work that is done in the course which involves sharing personal feelings and role-playing. In observing students in these activities, several were uncomfortable and requested to work alone on some projects. Statement 6, about learning styles, shows a combined total of 79% of the students responded positively after the course. Listening importance also increased to a total of 97%.

Table 6

Percentage of student responses to the last four objective statements of the post-course survey on career knowledge and curiosity.
SA (Strongly Agree) A (Agree) D (Disagree) SD (Strongly Disagree)

Part III	SA	A	D	SD
8. I am more curious and interested about my future career.		56	29	13	3
9. I know how to look for information about careers I may be interested in.		37	56	4	3
10. I feel better prepared to make choices that will affect my future.		8	66	26	0
11. This class has helped me learn more about myself.		34	48	18	0

After completion of the Adolescent Development course, all of the responses by the students in Table 6 show a positive increase in the knowledge and attitudes about future careers and making choices that will impact on them. I am pleased that 34% of the students strongly agree and 48% agree that this class has helped them learn more about themselves. I feel that the course overall has had a positive impact on the students that have participated in it.

The open-ended question at the end of the post-course

survey gave students the opportunity to state anything they would change about the class. Due to the variety of answers, it was not possible to record them on Table 6. Several students stated they would do less group work and would like to watch more videos. This may be attributed to the rise in disagreeing percentages recorded in Table 5, Statement 5. It was also suggested by 35% of the students, that the course should be part of the curriculum and should continue for the full year, rather than just a marking period. These students also felt many of the areas should have had more time devoted to them, however, due to time restrictions not enough detail was covered.

Several students also commented that the class should be held in a place other than a conventional classroom. In my opinion, because the class is an unstructured one and incorporates a variety of teaching and learning techniques, this is a valid comment and should be considered when evaluation of the course takes place.

Table 7

Guidance Survey- Background Information

Part I	Pre-course	Post-course
1. In your family who was born in the United States?		
Father	74%	78%
Mother	62%	58%
Yourself	18%	18%
Don't Know	3%	0%
2. Who do you live with at the present time?		
Mom	18%	28%
Dad	11%	11%
Mom and Dad	63%	58%
Grandparent(s)	8%	0%
Guardian(s)	0%	3%
3. Is your father/male guardian employed		
full-time	78%	84%
part-time	20%	11%
not employed outside the home	2%	5%
don't know	0%	0%
4. Is your mother/female guardian employed		
full-time	53%	48%
part-time	41%	44%
not employed outside the home	6%	8%
don't know	0%	0%
5. Father/male guardian		
job he does	Answers varied	

highest level of education completed	Answers varied
hours worked	Answers varied

6. Mother/female guardian

job she does	Answers varied
highest level of education completed	Answers varied
hours worked	Answers varied

7. Highest level of education you plan to complete

some high school	3%	8%
high school diploma	42%	34%
training after high school	8%	10%
some college - community/junior	18%	14%
four-year college degree	25%	28%
graduate school and beyond	4%	6%

8. Perfect career regardless of restrictions -- Answers varied

9. Level of training or education to achieve perfect career

some high school	0%	3%
high school diploma	11%	8%
training after high school	14%	18%
some college - community/junior	22%	24%
four-year college degree	31%	32%
graduate school and beyond	23%	15%

10. The main reason that would prevent you from achieving your perfect career

takes too many years of study	32%	32%
too much job competition	4%	8%
the job is too hard	28%	42%
I have poor grades	14%	10%
I'm not smart enough	6%	14%
other:	6%	6%

11. The person who has helped you the most to think about a future career:

father/male guardian	14%	12%
mother/female guardian	18%	22%
teacher	26%	24%
grandparent	8%	10%
peer/friend	4%	6%
counselor	18%	22%
brother/sister	3%	0%
adult/relative	6%	4%
other:	3%	0%

12. To reach my career goal, the one thing I need to improve most in seventh grade is:

my grades	20%	24%
my belief in my own ability	12%	10%
my interest in school	14%	12%
my school attendance	12%	12%
my specific career plans	36%	34%
my relationship with my parents	6%	8%
other	0%	0%

Chapter 5

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Problem Restatement

This study was conducted to examine the students who have participated in the Adolescent Development course. Characteristics of both students who had completed the course and students who had not were determined through the use of several different methods.

Description of Methods and Procedures Used

The methods used in this study were research, survey and observation. There were two surveys, one a pre-course survey and one a post-course survey, each made up of three parts. Part I consisted of four statements concerning the self-concept of the students and their relationships with peers, family. The second section was made up of three statements that examined areas related to learning style and group interaction in the classroom. There was also a statement referring to the importance of listening as a learning tool. The third part of the survey's objective statements had four statements specific to the students' curiosity concerning future careers and their desire to know themselves well

enough to research information about a career they are interested in. The last statement of the pre-course survey was for general information regarding how the students feel they are perceived by both parents and teachers. The final part of the post-course survey was an open-ended question to give the students an opportunity to express their opinions of what they would change about the course in the future. They pre-course survey was distributed to 38 students who had not completed the course, the post-course survey was distributed to 38 students who had just completed the course. A second survey was distributed to all 76 students in the survey to gather demographic information. The surveys were distributed at a school in northeastern New Jersey. They were done in groups during their class time in one class period. The demographic survey asked information about parents' employment status and the education and training the parents had received. The latter part of the demographic survey was designed to give background information concerning the students' concerns with the future and their desire to set goals for the future.

Observations of the students in this study were another

important aspect considered in this research. The classroom activities and the social interactions of the students were observed on a daily basis.

Findings

The information obtained from the student surveys provided some very interesting results. The students who had completed the course were more positive in their responses to the survey statements in every category. The responses to the first four statements of the survey began to show this.

In several of the statements I did not find the responses to the pre-course statements to be as negative as I had anticipated. In fact, 89% of these students were very positive in their response to feeling comfortable working in small groups and talking to others. Surprisingly, the post-course group reported a total of 79% positive responses for the same statement. It is possible that after participating in a number of group activities that require sharing personal feelings about family and self, several students feel uncomfortable in groups. The statement which dealt with parents and how they are perceived by them showed the greatest increase in

Part I. The post-course students reported a combined total of 76% positive responses concerning their parents as compared with the combined total of 31% positive responses in the pre-course group.

In my opinion, the responses in Part III of both surveys showed the most interesting results. The area of career awareness and preparation for the future shows the greatest number of changes from the negative to the positive. In knowing how to look for information about a career, only 25% of the students in the pre-course group felt they could do this as compared to 93% of the students who had completed the Adolescent Development course.

Conclusions

Based on the research information it can be concluded that school programs designed for adolescents have an important place in the education of young people. I found that the problems and insecurities experienced by adolescents are a concern and that many programs have been created to try to address their needs in the transition from childhood to adulthood. Lessons and activities that deal with relationships, values and decision-making and understanding emotions are valuable ones which will facilitate

positive self-concept development in the adolescent. Implementing a program of this kind is a necessary service we must provide to these children.

The learning and study skill portion of the course seems to be the least significant of the three phases of the course. Students seem to be much more concerned and eager to address the areas which deal with their feelings and relationships and responded most enthusiastically to the third part of the course which provides career assessment and information.

Teachers in all disciplines should be aware of the characteristics of young adolescents and more emphasis should be placed on creating an environment where students can feel accepted in their environment and comfortable expressing their opinions and concerns. Too often, teachers are expected to be focused on the curriculum requirements and academics and are not afforded the time or opportunity to allow students to communicate their feelings. School systems should encourage all staff members to become more involved in the social and emotional aspects of the students' lives for this is just as important as their academic education, and maybe

more so.

I do not feel there were any significant differences between the two groups I surveyed. Both groups were chosen at random, based on the period they had their cycle class. I believe the students as a whole enjoyed the Adolescent Development class and made definite improvements in their attitudes toward themselves. I believe they also came away with a better idea of what possibilities the future holds for them. My concern is that now that they have completed the course, there is, as yet, no follow-up to this program. These students will have to make schedule decisions in the eighth grade for their high school program. I firmly believe there is a need for a continuing course in this area to provide continuity and reinforcement in all of the areas that were taught. In order to have students continue to enhance their self-concept and pursue goals that they desire, curriculum changes at all levels are essential.

Much insight has been gained through this research. Some areas could have been improved, especially in the area of study and learning styles which I found to be the most difficult to define. My surveys could have been more specific in this area, which

discovered after they were completed by the students. Some of the information on the demographic survey could have been clearer to the students, who needed clarification in many areas. I also feel that the personality of the instructor of this course is paramount to its effectiveness and students taught by different teachers may have provided different data.

In conclusion, I found that the students did respond positively to the Adolescent Development classes. I believe, as all of the students complete this course, they will have gained knowledge about themselves, their relationships and their goals for the future. I found the groups to be cooperative and eager to participate in all of the activities. This does support the need for curriculum-based programs in the middle schools that address the living, learning and goal-setting skills of young adolescents. Finally, I would conclude that students' characteristics have less impact on the effectiveness of the course than the planning, implementation and personal characteristics of the instructor. I believe this course is beneficial for all students at the middle school level.

Recommendations for Additional Studies

1. A study to further prove the effectiveness of the Adolescent Development course in improving self-concept.
2. A study to compare students taking the same course but taught by different teachers..
3. A study to provide information from teachers of these programs to learn more effective methods of teaching and providing a facilitative environment for development.

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APPENDIX A

Student Survey - Pre-Course

Read each statement. Circle one of the following choices for each statement.

(SA) Strongly Agree (A) Agree (D) Disagree (SD) Strongly Disagree

1. I know who I am and understand my feelings.
   (SA) (A) (D) (SD)
2. I know how to get along well with people.
   (SA) (A) (D) (SD)
3. It is easy for me to express my likes and dislikes freely.
   (SA) (A) (D) (SD)
4. I understand my parents and how they feel about me.
   (SA) (A) (D) (SD)
5. I think listening is any important skill.
   (SA) (A) (D) (SD)
6. I feel comfortable working in small groups and talking to others.
   (SA) (A) (D) (SD)
7. I know how I learn best.
   (SA) (A) (D) (SD)
8. I am curious and interested about my future career.
   (SA) (A) (D) (SD)
9. I know how to look for information about careers I may be interested in.
   (SA) (A) (D) (SD)
10. I feel I can make choices that will affect my future.
    (SA) (A) (D) (SD)
11. I want to learn more about myself.
    (SA) (A) (D) (SD)
12. I feel my parents and teachers know me and accept me for who I am.
    (SA) (A) (D) (SD)

APPENDIX B

Student Survey - Post Course

Read each of the following statements. Circle one of the following choices for each statement.
(SA) Strongly Agree (A) Agree (D) Disagree (SD) Strongly Disagree

1. I know more about myself and my feelings.
   (SA) (A) (D) (SD)
2. I am more able to express my likes and dislikes to friends and adults.
   (SA) (A) (D) (SD)
3. I understand more about my parents and how they feel about me.
   (SA) (A) (D) (SD)
4. I know more about how to solve problems.
   (SA) (A) (D) (SD)
5. I feel more comfortable working in groups and talking to others.
   (SA) (A) (D) (SD)
6. I understand more about how I learn.
   (SA) (A) (D) (SD)
7. I feel that listening to others is an important skill.
   (SA) (A) (D) (SD)
8. I am more curious and interested about my future career.
   (SA) (A) (D) (SD)
9. I know how to look for information about careers I may be interested in.
   (SA) (A) (D) (SD)
10. I feel better prepared to make choices that will affect my future.
    (SA) (A) (D) (SD)
11. This class has helped me learn more about myself.
    (SA) (A) (D) (SD)
12. If you could change anything about this class, what would it be?

APPENDIX C

Guidance Survey - Background Information

Part 1:

1. In your family, who was born in the United States?
   a.___Father b.___Mother c.___Yourself d.___Don't know

2. Who do live with at the present time?
   a.___Mom b.___Dad c.___Mom & Dad d.___Grandparent(s)
   e.___Guardian(s)

3. Is your father/male guardian employed
   a.___Full-time b.___Part-time c.___not employed outside the home d.___don't know

4. Is your mother/female guardian employed
   a.___Full-time b.___Part-time c.___not employed outside the home d.___don't know

5. What is your father's/male guardian's job?(ex: sales, teacher...)
   How many hours a week?

_____

   What is the highest level of education he completed?
   a.___Some high school
   b.___High school diploma
   c.___Some college
   d.___Four-year college
   e.___Graduate school or beyond

6. What is your mother's/female guardian's job?(ex: sales, teacher...)
   How many hours a week?

_____

   What is the highest level of education she completed?
   a.___Some high school
   b.___High school diploma
   c.___Some college

d.___Four-year college
e.___Graduate school or beyond

7. What is the highest level of education you plan to complete?
   a.___Some high school
   b.___High school diploma
   c.___Training after high school
   d.___Some college - community/junior
   e.___Four-year college degree
   f.___Graduate school and beyond

8. Imagine your perfect career. Don't worry about the training or education needed, difficulty or qualifications. What would be your perfect career?

_____

9. From the choices in question 7, what level of training or education would you need to achieve your perfect career?_____

10. What is the main reason that would prevent you from achieving your perfect career?
   a.___takes too many years of study
   b.___too much job competition
   c.___the job is too hard
   d.___I have poor grades
   e.___I'm not smart enough
   f.___other:_____

11. Mark the person who has helped you the most to think about your future career.

a.___father/male guardian	f.___counselor
b.___mother/female guardian	g.___brother/sister
c.___teacher	h.___adult/relative
d.___grandparent	i.___other:
e.___peer/friend	_____

12. To reach my career goal, the one thing I need to improve the most in seventh grade is:

a.___my grades
b.___my belief in my own ability
c.___my interest in school
d.___school attendance
e.___specific career plans
f.___relationship with my parents
g.___other:_____

13. The career my family would like me to have is:

Part II:

For the following statements, choose from the following:

A. Strongly Agree
B. Agree
C. Don't Know
D. Disagree
E. Strongly Disagree

14. I have a clear understanding of the careers am considering:
A. B. C. D. E.

15. I know the kind of education or training I need for my career:
A. B. C. D. E.

16. I believe I can reach my current planned career goal:
A. B. C. D. E.

17. I believe my schoolwork now helps me prepare for my current career goal:
A. B. C. D. E

18. I believe I can reach my perfect career goal:
A. B. C. D. E.

Table 7a

Percentage of student responses to Part II of the guidance survey.

A. Strongly Agree B. Agree C. Don't Know
D. Disagree E. Strongly Disagree

Part II	A.	B.	C.	D.	E
14. I have a clear understanding of the careers I am considering.	14%	24%	18%	36%	8%
15. I know the kind of education or training I need for my career.	20%	22%	12%	28%	18%
16. I believe I can reach my current planned career goal.	25%	25%	18%	24%	8%
17. I believe my schoolwork now helps me prepare for my current career goal.	12%	28%	30%	28%	2%
18. I believe I can reach my perfect career goal.	16%	26%	32%	18%	8%

Table 8

Percentage of ethnic distribution in a northeastern New Jersey middle school.

Caucasion	76%
Hispancic	14.5%
African American	3.5%
Asian	4%
Other	2%